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Message Text

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51
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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7268
INFO CINCPAC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 15777

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PINS, TH
SUBJECT: PRESSURES FOR A NEW CONSTITUTION

REF: FBIS BANGKOK D070210 OCT 73

SUMMARY: THE RTG HAS REACTED STRONGLY TO THE FORMATION OF A STUDENT AND NON-STUDENT COALITION AGITATING FOR AN EARLY PROMULGATION OF A NEW CONSTITUTION. THE SPECIAL BRANCH POLICE ARRESTED TWELVE STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND NEWSPAPERMEN FOR DISTRIBUTING LEAFLETS ON OCTOBER 6. THERE SEEMS TO BE SOME EVIDENCE THAT A NON-STUDENT GROUP, POSSIBLY WORKING THROUGH EX-MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FROM NKHON PHANOM PROVINCE, KHAISAENG SUKAI, WAS USING THE STUDENT-ORIGINATED MOVEMENT FOR THEIR OWN UNSPECIFIED PURPOSES. THESE TWELVE DETAINEES ARE PRESENTLY CHARGED WITH INCITING PUBLIC UNREST. IF RTG DOES NOT HANDLE THIS SITUATION WITH CARE IT COULD PRESENT ANTI-GOVERNMENT FORCES WITH A CAUSE CELEBRE. END SUMMARY.

1. THIRAYUTH BOONMEE, FORMER LEADER OF THE NATIONAL STUDENT CENTER OF THAILAND (NSCT), ANNOUNCED THE FOUNDING OF THE "MOVEMENT CALLING FOR AN EARLY CONSTITUTION" ON OCTOBER 5 AND RELEASED A CONFIDENTIAL

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LIST OF NAMES OF 100 PEOPLE WHO HAD SIGNED A PETITION CALLING FOR

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AN EARLY CONSTITUTION. POLICE ARRESTED THIRAYUTH AND TEN OTHERS WHO WERE DISTRIBUTING LEAFLETS FOR STAGING A POLITICAL GATHERING OF MORE THAN FIVE PEOPLE ON OCTOBER 6 (REFTEL). AFTER A POLICE SEARCH, WHICH FOCUSED ON THE OFFICE OF FORMER NAKHON PHANOM MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT (MP) KHAISAENG SUKAI, THE ELEVEN WERE CHARGED WITH INCIING PUBLIC UNREST, A MORE SERIOUS OFFENSE PUNISHABLE BY UP TO SEVEN YEARS IN JAIL. THE RAID ON KHAISAENG'S OFFICE REPORTEDLY TURNED UP EVIDENCE THAT FORMER POLITICIANS HAD INSTI-GATED THE GROUP'S FORMATION FOR POLITICAL GAINS. A TWELFTH UNIVERSITY STUDENT WAS PICKED UP AND CHARGED ON OCTOBER 7. WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE POLICE HAD NO FOREWARNING OF THE ARRESTS AND SEARCHES WHICH APPARENTLY WERE CONDUCTED UNDER ORDERS FROM DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER PRAPHAT CHARUSATHIEN.

2. PRAPHAT SAID IN A NEWS CONFERENCE ON OCTOBER 9 THAT THE MOVE-MENT CALLING FOR AN EARLY CONSTITUTION WAS A FRONT FOR MORE SERIOUS POLITICAL PURPOSES, AND SINGLED OUT DOCUMENTS SEIZED FROM KHAISAENG'S OFFICE TO PROVE HIS POINT. PRAPHAT, HOWEVER, WENT TO SOME LENGTHS TO SAY THAT THE 100 SIGNERS OF THE PETITION SHOULD NOT CONSIDER THEMSELVES SUSPECT, AND THAT THE NSCT SHOULD NOT CONSIDER ITSELF THREATENED, BECAUSE THEY WERE NOT THE TARGETS OF THE ARRESTS.

3. NEWSPAPER REACTION TO THE ARRESTS HAS BEEN RESTRAINED. MOST EDITORIALS CONDEMNED ANY WHO MIGHT BE INVOLVED IN AN ACTUAL PLOT, BUT PRAISED THE WORTHWHILE GOAL OF HAVING AN EARLY CONSTITUTION. SOME UNIVERSITIES ARE JUST BEGINNING THEIR EXAMINATION PERIODS AND STUDENT SUPPORT FOR DEMONSTRATIONS MAY NOT BE HIGH JUST NOW. ON THE OTHER HAND, KASETSART UNIVERSITY IS NEARLY FINISHED WITH ITS EXAMS AND THAMMASAT HAS CANCELLED ALL EXAMS; SO POTENTIAL FOR MORE SERIOUS TROUBLE IS DEFINITELY THERE.

4. CONCLUSIONS: THERE IS SOME EVIDENCE THAT THE RTG MAY HAVE FOUND SHADY POLITICAL CONNECTIONS OF THE EARLY CONSTITUTION MOVE-MENT. IF THE RTG DOES NOT IDENTIFY THOSE BEHIND-THE-SCENE ACTORS PROMPTLY, IT WILL RISK CAUSING A POLITICAL FLARE UP WITH THE STUDENTS WHO COULD GARNER WIDE PUBLIC AND PRESS SUPPORT FOR THEIR CAUSE.
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